PRiSM a literary magazine

behind the scenes

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PRiSM a *literary* magazine

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FIRST KISS

Annelise Strigel

I'm in the mood for you—
For Caribbean blue
And that empty Bahama beach.

We stood knee deep in crystal water,
Toes buried in drenched sand—
I was drenched in you.
The spying sun scorched our burned shoulders
as saltwater breeze drew me to you.
All alone under open sky,
I searched your blue eyes
And saw the answer brimming over
Like the waves' crest breaking,
When everything comes together
And falls apart.

DESK-JOB: HALF PAST FOUR

Megan Davenport

No more prose.

The words all run together like sticky, slimy popsicles
melting on hot pavement.

They were dropped, you see.
Left there.
White plastic wrappers, folded back, for hungry mouths to caress a summer's treat.
bright Blue splatters on the side,
a solid tan stick slowly peeping out from behind an icy home.

But the words aren't Blue.
No, the words are yellow, mixing in with purple.
They are orange mashing into Blue under hot heels,
cursing the afternoon sun.
(the Blue should have never been)

Compliments oozing away to brown.. gray.. dark Bluish-purple mess.

Wash your hands.
Words are sticky in the summer's heat.

A RAPID DREAM
Sally Yacout

Pushing breeds of platonic light
Across vast fields
Smothered in a shine so loose by translation
--- a creation
of drops in competition with the seas.

REALIZED CONTROL
Sally Yacout

For the longest time
I yearned for the ability
To change the past
By way of the present
Only to realize
It was the future
Which I needed to tame
So I picked up a pen
And created these reins

PRE-DIVORCE
Annelise Strigel

As a kid, she would run barefoot,
Fall dizzy on the dying grass
On her back, while the fever of a slap
Still scorched her freckled cheek.
She would spin into rose sky and hum
Herself a lullaby.

Only this way could she sink away to calm.
The backyard escape drowned blaming noise:
Mom's muffled sobs, Dad's boiling silence,
The bourbon bottle's defiant shatter
Against cold tile.

She would squint for Heaven behind the sunset
And trace the V of a flock of geese
Soaring black through the seams of clouds.
Then a breath of breeze sent her wishes
To the man hiding on a sliver
Of faded moon.

IN LIFE
Sarah Wise

in life
we float
through waking,
breathing, sleeping,
and dreaming.
but today
i awoke
and refused
to float
and so
cannot sleep.

TABLETS

Rebecca Mimnall

The bottle tips,
I don't mean it
But they spill into my hand.
Thirty tablets.
The weight so familiar in my palm,
And for one earth-shattering moment
The world stops.
And my **demons** –
My **weakness** –
Arise.
How easy it would be!
So easy.
Tip the hand.
Grab the water.
Swallow the promise of oblivion.
I should be horrified.
Repulsed.
And part of me is,
Yet something whispers.

"Remember.
Don't you remember?"
The feelings, the rush, the intense calm.
As those tiny, potent tablets slide lovingly,
smoothly down your throat.
"Don't you remember?"
Remember how it
How glorious!
Those moments after,
When nothing matters anymore.
You may have just killed yourself
But who cares?
All you want is peace.
Oblivion.
Temporary or Permanent.
Who cares?
You could sleep.
You could **escape**.
And the demons whisper.

The pills in my hand now heavy,
Weighing 100 pounds each.
And how easy it would be!
The world stills and waits,
But I've been down that road before.
The moment passes.
The all too tempting tablets concealed,
Nestled back into their orange home.
The whispers quiet –
Demons suppressed.
Until tomorrow, at least.

HE WAS A HE, AND I WAS A SHE

Erika Galluppi

He was a he,
And I was a she;
So we fought like
Dogs and cats.
He was the canine,
And I was the feline;
He chomped on my fingers,
And I scratched up his face.
He, being my brother's friend,
And I, being my brother's sister,
Never quite saw eye-to-eye.
He said that I was too chunky,
I called him a chauvinistic asshole prick,
And my brother threw pinecones at both of us.
He was the last guy on earth to ever be date-worthy,
And I'd never meet his 'skinny model' standards.
God forbid we'd ever be a 'we,'
Leading to k-i-s-s-i-n-g,
Up in that damn sing-song tree.
Though he did have nice eyes,
And I know he admired my legs,
Our coupling was certainly never to be.
For, he'd gleefully strangle me,
I'd lovingly boot him in the balls,
And we both would end up in the slammer.
So, we fought and fought,
And belittled and harassed,
Teased and tormented,
Hissed and—in his case—pissed,
And joshed and joked
From dawn to dusk.
Then he'd close his mouth,
And I'd sheath my claws,
To fight again the following day.
He was a he,
And I was a she,
So...
He couldn't admit that he thought I was cute,
And...
I refused to say: "I love you too."

WHAT SECRETS LURK BENEATH A TURTLE SHELL?

Erika Galluppi

"Slow and steady wins the race..."
– at least, that's the propaganda issued forth by the turtle.
Pardon me, I mean the *tortoise*.
His agent wanted him to change his name – after he started winning, that is.
Up until then, he was just a common ole Box Turtle.
And secretly, behind closed shell:
Pap was a snapper; Ma died on a highway, crushed by a careless trucker; and 'Lil Bro lost a leg in a riverboat accident.
Family history makes excellent fodder for talk soup,
leading to Nike contracts and Wheaties covers.
'Course, the turtle's little addiction would be just as delicious,
albeit a career-devastating exposé
if known to gossipy creepy-crawlies and forest critters.

Sadly, no one is quite that laid back without
A Little Something-Something
in his or her bloodstream.
Besides, he only crossed the finish line because he had the munchies,
and because he was spurred on by dancing pebbles, luminous colors,
and talkative rainbows in the sky.
Slow and steady wins the race,
or so the turtle wants us to think.
"Slow and steady..." – screw that!
He tripped the rabbit with his scaly leg.
But, before you give our hairy friend sympathy,
know this: he was on steroids.

THE REVOLUTIONARY

Antonia Hoyland

I am the incendiary
I will set them all aflame with the fires I harbor in my passionate soul
Let no thirsts stay unquenched
My fire will fill them with Rioja
Blood has always been red
They will rage.

I am the mercury
(I mesmerize, I know.)
I will say and do and go at my discretion
My amontillado self will poison
They are the dead ones
Words edged to dull the wits of pop-culture the populace
My quicksilver tongue will leap to match in any event
They will know me.

I will rage with them.
I am the Freixenet
My explosions will light up every city the way my eyes do when I touch the thick water
We will stand on the rooftops with the Fiddler who never used to play
Filled with bread that sticks to the roof of his mouth
They will know me.
I am the incendiary.
I pray the snow turns white.
Snow should be white.

GRAVEYARD SHIFTERS

Kristin Kirkland

It's midnight and if I do not find a power cord my laptop will not be awake in time for class tomorrow. I feel like a cave digger as my car hums down the road, trying to crawl through the dark with only a feeble flashlight. But there is light at the end of the tunnel, Wal-Mart. I pull into a sea of black, and whoosh, I'm inside. Immediately goose bumps spring up on my arms and legs. *Why is it always twenty degrees cooler indoors than out?*

Aha! Power cords, $4.99, not bad. I search for the shortest line, not necessary at twelve-thirty in the morning, but it's a habit. In the fluorescent light everything looks surreal, like things moving in slow motion. Maybe that's what's taking so long.

My gaze wanders to the register. A girl there, a young girl, no more than twenty-five or twenty-six. What is she doing there? Shouldn't she be home asleep or studying? Is there someone waiting up for her, a boyfriend, husband, parent, child? What if *her* little girl wakes up in the middle of the night, sweaty and out of breath, mommy not there to scare the monsters away or soothe her fears? She looks tired. Of course it is almost quarter to one now, but who knows how much longer she will be here once I leave?

Her vest is littered with little buttons that clink together when she moves, "Number One in Customer Service," "Ask me about Wal-Mart specials." Did anybody ask her what she wanted? Is this what she dreamed of becoming, a Wal-Mart employee on the graveyard shift? Funny, I always thought it was called graveyard shift because it was in the dead of the night, but now I see it is because they are sending people to their graves. Shouldn't she be out with her friends? I wonder what circumstances bought her this place behind the register. I see loneliness, a mother and child left with no father, but maybe that is wrong.

There is a note pasted beside the keypad of the register. I can't make out the words, but the handwriting is scratchy and masculine. Maybe instead she is working hard to pay for graduate school, for her dream of becoming a doctor, a pediatrician. And at the end of her shift she goes out to her lover who is waiting on the bench. He slips a note in her back pocket, one to add to her collection. They always make her laugh.

I'm home now. I don't remember how I got here. The plight of this girl, Tiffany her name tag reads, still fills my mind. My computer kicks on, and I crawl into bed to sleep while Tiffany works on, fading under the fluorescent lights.

VERBAL OR PHYSICAL

Kristin Kirkland

He was doing it again – that thing she hated, detested more than anything. It made her heart hurt and her stomach turn over. Why does he do that? When he emerged from the bathroom, his eyes weak, jaw slack, she just stared at him, a mixture of pity and disgust. Pity always won. He lay down on the bed, one body part at a time, not to jar his stomach. She sighed and put down her work.

Crouching beside him, she murmured, "You all right?"

He didn't respond, just lay there. She began tracing small circles on his bare back. The clock ticked. Her hands fanned out until his whole back was being kneaded and manipulated, the pain smoothed away.

"Thank you."

This time it was her turn not to speak. It was a game they played – if you choose not to acknowledge me, I won't acknowledge you: not out of spite really, more out of pride. Her heart ached, *answer my questions*, but she didn't dare ask them out loud. They'd been through it before. He rolled over, the bed creaking underneath the sudden movement.

"I'm sorry, baby."

Silence on her end, best not to interrupt.

"You know I can't help it."

She gave in. "I know."

Satisfied, he retreated, feigning sleep. Relaxing into him, she brushed back his hair, silky between her fingers.

"Leah?"

"Yes."

"Do you love me?"

"Of course," she replied, still distracted by his hair.

"How much do you love me?"

"A lot."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

The clock ticked. His breathing turned rhythmic.

"Did you notice anything?" she asked his sleeping form. Nothing. Of course not. How do you notice what you are too busy ignoring?

****

"What's that?"

Leah flicked her eyes over the counter. "Where?"

"That, in your ear."

"My earring?"

"No, in the top."

"Oh, I pierced it yesterday."

"Yesterday."

"Yes," she clarified, "yesterday."

The atmosphere changed then. Sudden stillness suffocated her in the small bathroom, six feet by nine feet, too small for the shouting match that was seconds away.

"Take it out," under his breath, the words fell heavy in the silence.

How far will I go?

"No," equally quiet, equally measured, fighting words.

Seth was not a big guy, but he did work out. Coming home smelling of sweat, he glistened with pride and self-satisfaction. Later when his muscles ached, he would grin and say, "I love this feeling, work till it hurts."

He would love to rip out her earring too, wouldn't care if it hurt. I love this feeling, work till it hurts. Seth had returned to the bedroom, she remained where she was, eyes on her own reflection, returning its stare. An eye for an eye.

"Why would you do that?" Seth was back.

"It wasn't for you," a new thought to Leah, but true. "It was for me."

"But you know I don't like stuff like that."

"Why not? It can't be that earth shattering. You didn't even see it yesterday."

"I hardly looked at you."

Case closed; you weren't looking. An eye for an eye. *You are the one who wants a tattoo.* Something told her not to say it. This was not a game of blame. A rebuttal wouldn't make a difference, only heighten his anger. An eye for an eye or would it be an ear for an ear? Doesn't matter, Hammurabi did not apply in this room, a bathroom too small for confrontations and big ideas. The words bounced off the ceiling and the mirror, looking for escape, but finding none. She gathered them up and let them warm the fire inside, fuel the anger.

He was talking again, something about not liking it, deep hatred for it. Why did he think she didn't discuss it with him? Because maybe she thought when he saw it, it wouldn't be a shock. He would see how small and uneventful it was in the vastness of their lives, but no, in his constricted world it was an ugly eyesore. She had forgotten about the narrow alleyway he walked and swept clean of the trash she was becoming, people with bolts in their lips or red streaks in their hair, vivid from miles away, the freaks.

She reached out for him, suddenly needed his solid presence to reassure her of her own existence. He pulled away. She snaked an arm around his waist and he bolted from her side, afraid to catch her disease of spontaneity.

"I'm leaving," he said, a small statement for the enormity of the situation. The door slammed.

Jarred, she moved to the bed, twisting her earring round and round, feeling the pain as it worked to carve a hole in her flesh. I love this feeling, work till it hurts.

HOPEFULLY
Sally Yacout

Hopefully
We can all learn to see each other
With sincerity.
Otherwise
We'll have to dive into
The obscurity
Of an infinite amount of numbers
Labeled as:

The only possibility.

KNOCKING
Joanna Grey

Life
  Is forever
    Knocking at my door

It beckons me
  To grow
    To learn
      To love.

Its voice
  Is strong,
    Understanding,
      Constant

One day
  I welcome it
    Willingly;

The next
  I pretend
    To not hear it.

Yet, life will not
    Ever
      Leave me in silence.

For without its call,
    I would
      Cease
        Learning how
          To live

PAW PRINTS ON THE GROUND
K. Leah Farmer

Paw prints on the ground
Raccoons run from hound.
Up a tree! Up a tree!
Must be free! Must be free!
Raccoons run from hound.

SEVEN WAYS TO LOOK AT CHALK

K. Leah Farmer

Little Red Robin Hood
So easily fooled
By the soft voice
Of the Wolf who ate chalk.

The clitter-clatter
Of the chalk hitting the board
Is the sound of math.

Chalk is a child's
Temporary graffiti
To paint the world
A pretty place.

Don't eat chalk
Or let the chalk eat you.

It takes much strength
To own up to something
To admit a wrong
And to chalk it up.

A stick of white so soft yet firm
Distinct smell and sound
A teacher's weapon of choice
Chalk. Chalk. Chalk.

The white of flour
The powder of talc
The compressed piece
Is that of chalk.

YOUR EYES

Megan Davenport

Pain trickles down
Can't move
Can't breathe

Don't lie to me

"Do what's going to make you happy."

No...

Don't let your conscience
be your fucking guide

Don't lie to me

"I'll never hurt you."

Eyes like tears
that were never cried?

No...

Eyes just gray
and empty inside

THE TREES ARE BURSTING INTO FLAME

Sarah Wise

The trees are bursting into flame.
A vibrant show, annual game.
Orange, red, brilliant yellow,
Their cool green dresses drain their mellow.
The lusty leaves begin to sway
As winds and limbs exhibit their play.
Blustery breezes bring on the dance,
Movements of dire circumstance.
For though bold leaves put on their show,
Their coming end they still must know.
Their brilliance succeeded by
The sad time when leaves must die.
The wide world turns, without a sound,
As brilliant dancers now sail down.

THE TELLER

Laura Azzu

Things happen. You think about the past, a web of events you cannot change. But you pretend you can. And you begin to spend the present reliving the past. All the should-have-beens, could-have-beens, would-have-beens send you spinning through time, past and present. A damp breeze is all it takes to remind you of the present and send you stumbling back into your Tuesday morning.

Peering down at his watch, Drew found himself envious of the gold face and hands ticking back at him. It was conscious. It was alert. It was awake. He lacked these things so early in the morning but hoped to find them with the help of his Starbucks. Digging through his wallet, he found only the three dollars for his latte. He'd need a quick stop at the bank before his morning commute.

Sipping his coffee, soaking up every drop of caffeine it had to offer, Drew wrenched open the door of First National Bank. In the line that stemmed from the teller's counter, he stood looking out at the cloud-filled sky. It was not supposed to rain this morning. He recalled how the meteorologists on channels three, six, and forty-two promised sunny skies. "Next."

"Hey, I just wanted to cash this check."

"Right," said the teller as he directed his attention to his computer screen. There was something familiar about him. His eyes. His voice. While the man typed numbers into his computer, Drew happened to glance at the name on the man's tag: Cameron. Not an unusual name. But there was something there, something Drew just couldn't put his finger on. Then it all came together—the voice, the eyes, the hair, everything. With the sensation of being slapped across the face, Drew realized just who this man was. Could it really be? It was unmistakably him. Drew's thoughts became fuzzy as he felt the heat rise in his face. Looking anywhere but at Cameron, he prayed his realization was not obvious to anyone else. He thought he was safe. Cameron probably didn't notice.

"Sorry, but I have to ask," said Cameron. Starting to sweat, Drew knew what was coming next. "You didn't go to Westbury High School, did you?"

"Yeah. It's me, Drew."

"Whoa! I can't believe this. How long has it been? Like fifteen years?"

"Yeah, about that long."

"So how's it goin'? You work in the city or something?" said Cameron, gesturing towards Drew's suit and tie.

"Yeah, I do some graphic design stuff for some companies there."

"That sounds great."

"Yeah, it's pretty cool." Cameron kept on nodding and smiling. And Drew did the same. "Sorry about the wait. These old computers are pretty slow in the morning."

"Don't worry about it. I'm not in a hurry." Tap. Tap. Tap. His fingers rapped on the countertop, instinctively, incessantly.

"So, how are your folks? They still live in town?"

"Yep. Same old house too." Memories poured back into Drew's mind. He remembered sleeping out in the back yard with Cameron, watching Monday night football in the den, playing poker in his bedroom. Just looking at these two men, seemingly strangers, you wouldn't realize how many good times they once shared.

Feeling air push itself into and out of his lungs, Drew let out a sigh and began to fidget in his jacket pockets. That's when he remembered his pack of cigarettes. Taking them out of his pocket, he saw a "no smoking" sign staring angrily back at him. He had seen that sign many times before but still could not seem to remember it when he reached for his cigarettes while waiting for his receipt. As he tucked them back into his pocket, Drew stole a sideways glance at Cameron. He was loosening the tie that was apparently starting to strangle him. And they waited.

"Should be any minute now. Sorry this is taking so long.

"No, it's fine." Crack. Crack. Crack. Drew pushed down on each of his knuckles; it was a kind of painful pleasure he could not help. As silence descended between them, Drew slipped into thought, asking himself questions he already knew the answers to. What could have happened to make this man, once his closest friend in the world, seem like a complete stranger? No fight, no unforgivable things said or done, no bad feelings between them at all. College happened. Life happened. They met new people. And they went to different places. And they forgot about each other. That happens, though, doesn't it? Can you really rely on those second-grade promises of best friends forever?

With a rush of lights and beeps, the printer behind the counter sprang to life. Drew could have sworn a wave of relief washed over Cameron's face.

"All right, well, there you go. Sorry you had to wait so long."

"Yeah, well it was great seeing you again."

"Absolutely. Hopefully I'll see ya around sometime."

"Yeah, definitely. Well, um, thanks."

"See ya later," said Cameron. One last smile.

Drew turned and headed for the door, thinking of what had just happened, thinking of what would have been, should have been, could have been. He went to unlock the driver side door, and as he did, a damp breeze played with his hair, cooled his cheeks. And he stumbled back into his Tuesday morning.

QUIET

Rebecca Mimnali

Have you noticed?
There is never any real quiet
No place to go,
Free from the hideous voices.
From the pressure of crowds,
Of rowdy college kids
And snooby businessmen.
No secret haven away.
Just away
Everywhere is full.
Of people.
Of this chaotic definition of life
Packed with tourists.
And their cameras
And fake smiles
Have you noticed?
There is no alone anymore
Alone has become lonely.
A social stigma
Anti-social and abnormal.
To like the quiet, the alone,
Is taboo anymore
Have you ever wanted to just go?
Go to the quietest place you can find.
And just live
A tiny cottage with a picket fence,
In the middle of nowhere
No drunken voices outside the window.
No orange glow from a busy city.
No ugly exhaust from a car culture.
Or shrill sirens that pierce the night.
Only you and your thoughts.
Alone in the quiet.
What a perfect dream,
Such a beautiful image.
Yet unrealizable.
It slips through the fingers like sand.
And leaves you stranded,
Amid the noise and the destruction

FOR YOU

Megan Davenport

Let me lay you down
And whisper in your ear.
Let me lay you down
And lie right there beside you.

Feel my kisses on your skin.
My worries melt away
While I lie so close aside you.

Let me lay you down,
My heart takes in your heat.
Let me lay you down.
I'll find myself alongside you.

Feel me lay you down
As I show you what's been waiting.
Feel me lay you down,
Then you'll find me lying by you.

Let me lay you down,
Brush the hair from in your face,
Place my kisses on your cheek,
Caught in a state of grace.

Once I lay you down,
Only love will guide you.

Once I lay you down,
I'll stay right there beside you.

YOU AND I UNDER THE STARS

Kenia Caze

You and I under the stars
Gazing into eyes speaking forbidden feelings.
Your lips to my forehead
My nose
My lips.
Hands caressing my face
My shoulders
My waist.
What's wrong?
What's wrong?
Could it be?
No
Not you.
This man holding me
This man I love
This man who is not capable of loving back
Is standing before me unable to speak,
Speak the words he may be afraid to utter.
I...
Love...
You...?
Could this be the moment I've been waiting for?

In a world with millions
I only see us.
Your hands
Your strong hands
Your eyes
Your brown eyes
What's wrong?
What is it that you need to say?
I...
Love...
You...?

WHITE SHEET

Candace Simms

White Sheet
As the white sheet covers me,
I am only asleep.
I will awake, comforted
At the side of his feet
Each tear that falls
s not wasted on me.
They are collected as kisses,
Rain drops to the sea,
Prayers at night.
Lit candles in the wind -
The clock strikes three
Life ends and begins.
Heart beats like a drum.
Memories fly in your head
But close tight your window -
In your mind I'm never dead

The white sheet covers me
To protect me from harm.
Tomorrow is a new
And like the stars in the sky,
He watches over you
I lie in the unconscious with closed eyes.

TRUTH

Kimberly Jeans

The lights go dim.
My heart beats a thousand times;
My mind races quick as horses' hooves.
Then, everything goes silent.

I raise my eyes to the heavens.
A song escapes from my throat -
A song which only you could inspire.

You've given me more love
than I could have ever imagined.
You've turned my darkness into light.
You've helped me find my voice, my way.

There's no turning back.
I've changed -
You've changed me.
I'm no longer the same woman I used to be.
I'm different.

I see the world in a new way.
Through your eyes I see the world.
I see its beauty;
I see its passion.

Through your eyes I see myself.
I see my worth,
My passion,
My life.

Forever will I be thankful.
Forever will I be a part of you.
My life is now in your hands -
Take it and make it true.

PEACE COLLEGE | 05 - 06